

Nickel's Width by Acai

Series: [support my children \[1\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Coming Out, Some cute kids fluff, Trans Female Character, Trans Male Character, Transboy Mike, Transgirl El, childhood friendships, supportive friendships

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson (mentioned), Eleven (Stranger Things), Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair (mentioned), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Will Byers & Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-04

Updated: 2017-11-04

Packaged: 2022-04-02 14:36:43

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,041

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Ted Wheeler is a coward.

Mike Wheeler isn't.

Nickel's Width

Author's Note:

what a good morning to destroy the stereotype that trans people's names are close to their deadnames ! most trans people pick names that sound nothing like their birth names, so mike's birthname is just a random 80s name i found on a website for moms tbfh.

also !! mike's still pretty little in the beginning of this, so keep in mind that he's handling his emotions the way that frustrated little kids tend to do best, which is throwing complete fits.

Mike's father is a coward.

Well, no, scratch that. Mike's father is unafraid of many things. He's not afraid to go in the backyard and yell at things in the dark while waving a rifle around, just in case it's some criminal. He's not afraid to threaten men he argues with at the supermarket. In fact, he's a rather tough man altogether.

Except for the fact that he's not. Because in reality, Mike's father is an incredibly meek and mild man—as most tough men are. Mike's father is scared of his own wife; he's afraid to displease her, and waits on her like her meager and mild servant.

It's not the same as Lucas' parents. Lucas' dad pampers his wife, and never calls her wrong, just like Mike's own dad. Except—except not like Mike's, because Lucas' dad does it because he loves his wife. He massages her feet because he knows she's been working hard all day, and he listens to her stories because he likes hearing what she has to say, and he never calls her wrong because he listens to her opinions even if he disagrees.

Mike's dad does it because he's afraid of upsetting his wife.

Mike hated that when he was growing up. *Grow up*, he had wanted to

sneer. *Be a man.*

It had made sense in his head, too, that his father was just a weak little snotty-nosed man. Because Mike had been raised proper—but not as a proper boy, because nobody had seen him like that. Not when he'd been little. He'd been raised to grow into a lady, dainty and mannered. He'd been raised to like tough boys, strong men, and so his father—well, his *father* hadn't been a prime example.

When he got older, though, Mike had been grateful.

Because as tough as his mother had been on his father, she'd doted on her kids.

She was a tough woman. She had strict punishments, like selling toys or writing lines, but she loved her kids. She didn't show it often, but she did it just enough to let Mike be certain about the fact that she'd do just about anything for them.

Nuclear family, Nancy had sneered one morning, biting into her toast and hissing under her breath so that their parents wouldn't hear. *They're playing dolls for adults, Laurie.* Because, of course, that's what his name had been—which was pretty tough luck, in Mike's personal opinion. *They've all lost their minds.*

Mike hadn't agreed.

Starting school meant meeting Will Byers, and meeting Will Byers meant meeting perhaps the quietest boy Mike would ever encounter. Will was, in a way or two, soft. Not *physically* soft; there was always something sharp about Will's eyes, but soft in the way that he would breathe out his words as murmurs and apologize for little things, like their legs brushing because Will was swinging his own legs too hard.

Will was raised proper, too, but as a proper boy. He was raised proper in the way that he would let Mike go first in their games, and he was raised proper in the way that he would always greet Mike with a soft *hello, you look nice today*, when their parents were around. Mike didn't have a problem with it, not then. Because, well, so what? After all, all the boys were like that.

It's only uncomfortable when Mike learns *why* the boys are so polite. It begins in second grade, when Mike goes to Will's to play for the first time. Their mothers sit on the swing on the front porch, giggling. They call Will *dashing*, and they call Mike *darling*.

"Laurie's dress is absolutely darling! Where in the world did you get that fabric?"

"The supermarket, would you believe?" And then they'd giggle into their palms. *"Oh, but Joyce, where on Earth did you find that little polo? Look at your dashing boy, oh, he's gonna be a heartbreaker."*

It's uncomfortable, really, when Mike meets Will's dad. Not because his dad isn't nice (though he isn't), but because Will's dad scans over Mike once, and then turns to his son with stern eyes.

"You protect her now, you hear? You keep her safe."

It started a fire, deep in Mike's gut. He asks about it, later, when they're drinking lemonade on the back porch and their mothers are chatting inside.

"I don't need protecting," he had muttered. "I'm taking karate."

"Oh." Will had said, because it always took Will a few seconds to think up a reply. "I don't think he meant that you couldn't. Well, you probably can't, but even if you can, you shouldn't, right?"

And Mike had *stared* back, wide-eyed and owlshly confused. "Why?"

"Well--," Will said, blinking back at him. "Well, 'cause you're a girl."

"So?"

"So—so, girls don't fight." Will's eyebrows knit together so quickly that it looked as if a unibrow had just appeared on Mike's friend's head out of the blue. "...do they?"

"You have to protect me 'cause I'm a girl?" Mike sputtered, in the elegant way that seven year olds tended to sputter.

Will stared back at him, bangs falling into his eyes. "Boys hafta watch

out for girls, cause boys are strong, and my dad says they should treat girls right. Y'know...pulling out their chairs and opening doors for them and stuff...right?"

So then Mike, of course, was left with no choice except for wrestling Will Byers to the ground and pushing his face into the dirt.

Will had looked lost, eyes wide like dinner plates and dazed as he watched Mike stand up and place his hands on his hips.

"I'm stronger than you, so *I'll* protect *you*," he declared, and when their mothers squealed at the sight of their children covered in mud, neither offered up an explanation.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

They're in third grade when Mike has to go to an anger management counselor. He tries to explain that he's not angry, not usually. His mother tiredly offers up that he's not an angry child, he just snaps sometimes. He fights other children and yells at adults and pounds his fists into whatever's closest. *But she's not an angry girl*, his mother had stressed. *She's really a lamb most of the time. What's wrong with her?*

What's wrong with her?

What's wrong with her?

What's wrong with her?

The anger management counselor hadn't come up with much, because Mike wasn't exactly going to tell the truth.

He wasn't angry, not really. He just...well, he snapped sometimes, when people treated him like a dumb little girl. And, well, when people treated him like a girl at all, really.

They're in fourth grade when Mike really snaps. He and Will Byers are at his house, and Mike's mother is making dinner, and they're asking Mike's father if they can play outside. His father is saying no, because *girls shouldn't play outside in this weather, especially not at night!*

And suddenly Mike's crying—fat, wet tears go tumbling down off his face and plunge into the carpet. He's not noisy, he's rather silent, really. He sniffs noisily and smears his tears with his sweater sleeve, and soft little Will Byers runs off, returning a few moments later with tissues and Mike's mom. Will blots the tears away messily and Mike's mom fusses. Will goes home early and Mike cries into his mom's shoulder for what feels like hours.

"Laurie," she pleaded, rubbing her boy's back. "What's wrong, Laurie, what's wrong?"

Which of course hadn't helped much, and the frustration had welled up in him, bubbling over. Mike had yelled, thrashing and sobbing and angry. He had cried and cried until Nancy had come home from her friend's house, scampering up the stairs to get away from the noisy drama, and Mike had cried for her until his mother brought her back down.

He tells Nancy later that night that he hates his name, that he hates being treated like a girl. He tells her that he hates being a girl, that's he's not one and he never has been. Nancy scrunches up her eyebrows and shrugs, saying, "okay," and moving on.

She tells their mother later, and their mother looks overwhelmed. Mike cries and cries, and finally their mother concedes, still looking lost, agreeing that they'll work this out.

She call him her son for the first time the week after that, and buys him a collection of clothes from the boy's section.

Will informs Mike that his dad's left, and Mike informs Will that he'll fight him again if he ever calls him Laurie again. Then, when Will looks a little owlish with fright once again, Mike offers a condolence for Will's dad.

"He's not dead," Will replies. "Mom says he is to her, but he's not really."

"He taught you all that stupid stuff," Mike says, still bitter.

Will shrugs. "Girls like that stuff."

“I don’t.”

Will peers at him from under his too-long bangs, undeterred. “You aren’t much of a girl.”

And Mike deems it safe to tell Will, too, and Will looks lost just like Mike’s mother, but agrees wholeheartedly, nonetheless.

Mike notices them both calming down considerably after that. Mike doesn’t have angry fits anymore, to the relief of his poor mother, and Will isn’t so high-strung, and he doesn’t exercise his dad’s dumb rules now that he’s not around to enforce them. Mrs. Byers doesn’t teach him that stuff—Mrs. Byers has always been cool, though.

“Mike,” he introduces himself on the first day of fifth grade. “Michael James Wheeler.”

It’s not like nobody knows, but nobody cares enough about the Wheeler kid to do anything about it. Mike wonders if that’s a good thing—being so insignificant that not even bullies waste their time on you.

Nothing interesting happens to him, and nothing interesting ever does, but that’s okay.

He hangs out with Will, who’s also insignificant, and they meet Dustin. And Dustin introduces them to a boy named Lucas, and Lucas and Dustin become part of their insignificant little pact.

They play D&D in the basement and stay up late at night imagining interesting things that could happen in their lives, but what never will.

And Mike—Mike doesn’t tell them, but he doesn’t think he really needs to. He might, someday. *If the world is ending*, he thinks, because like hell he would mention it of his own will otherwise.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

There’s a lot of things about El that Mike likes from the minute he

meets her. For one, she doesn't exactly understand society. If she actually lived with other people, that might be a problem. But seeing how she just lives in Mike's basement now, it's not, and Mike likes it. El doesn't know about things being right or wrong, and Mike has a feeling that she wouldn't care much if she knew that there was an astounding and insignificant difference between Mike and other boys.

El is different, too.

Lucas says she's not girlish enough—she's so un-girlish, in fact, that it's suspicious. And so Mike fishes out some of Nancy's old clothes (that aren't really Nancy's old clothes) from a box that's not too old yet, and El gets as close to giddy as she probably can when she looks in the mirror.

"Pretty," she murmurs, and Mike wonders if she's very familiar with emotions like happiness. She never seems happy, and he worries for a moment that it's just one of those things that she doesn't quite understand. He decides that she'll learn, that they'll teach her. They'll start here, by letting her try on Nancy's-but-not-really-Nancy's dresses, because Mike doesn't need them anymore.

He'll learn soon that the world is indeed ending, and because Mike's not a coward, he'll tell them. They'll have their own little countdown to the end of it all and Mike will suck it up and tell them how things are. And it'll be fine, he's sure, because there's much bigger things to worry about right now. Maybe they'll ask about it later, when the world's not ending, because of course they're going to win, and Mike will explain, and it will all be fine, and that will be that.

Author's Note:

[message me on tumblr](#)// aobajosighs

[twitter](#) // aobajosighs

[instagram](#) // aobajosighs

Leave a comment telling me what you thought.

Thanks!